

TOPICAL RED CROSS NEWS

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INFORMATION NOTES

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The Cuban Question

THE ICRC AND THE UNITED NATIONS' REQUEST FOR INTERVENTION

The International Committee of the Red Cross did not receive without some surprise the United Nations' request for it to exercise a control on vessels bound for Cuba. In fact, the task which it had thus been asked to undertake clearly went beyond its traditional activity. And yet the ICRC did not consider that it could refuse UNO's request. Neither did he accept straight away but delegated a mission of contact and information to New York.

Thus, the ICRC clearly showed that it was prepared to contribute to the efforts undertaken for the maintenance of peace, at a time when a grave threat of a nuclear war was hanging over the world. It is conscious that it has in this way remained faithful to the ideal of the Red Cross.

In communiqués (see p. 7) and in statements to the press, the ICRC defined its position. However, since it appears not to have always been exactly understood and, as its communiqués have even given rise to strikingly different interpretations, it considers that it will be serving a useful purpose once again to define that position.

It was the reality of a terrible threat hanging over humanity which induced the ICRC not to decline UNO's request, in spite of the unusual character of the task which had been proposed to it. In fact, it could be feared that, in the event of nuclear war, the Red Cross, placed in front of a disaster without precedent, might no longer be able to carry out its action of aid to victims with its hoped-for effectiveness. Thus the ICRC considers it to be in accordance with its essential mission to endeavour to prevent such suffering. Adopting a different attitude could have been construed by some as an abandonment on the part of the Red Cross in the face of greatest peril.

The Red Cross was created a hundred years ago to lessen the evils of war. Now, since Solferino, technical development has placed into the hands of combatants methods of destruction which have no longer anything in

common with those which had then appalled Henry Dunant. The Red Cross is obliged to adapt itself to this development.

Drawing conclusion from these observations, the ICRC considered that it would remain within the framework of its humanitarian mission by helping to avert a conflict which could have unleashed an atomic war and provoked such immense distress.

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The acting Secretary-General of the United Nations
writes to Mr. Paul Ruegger

As he was about to leave New York, Mr. Paul Ruegger received the following letter from Mr. Thant, acting Secretary-General of the United Nations:

"As you are about to return to Switzerland after several days of extensive and fruitful consultations at United Nations Headquarters in, I wish to express to you my personal gratitude for the important service you and the International Committee of the Red Cross are rendering to the United Nations and the cause of peace.

My appreciation of this service is heightened by my realisation that the favourable response of the International Committee of the Red Cross to my invitation was given despite the fact that the service the organisation was being called upon to provide was unusual and unprecedented in view of the traditional activities and those based on the Red Cross Conventions. I understand, however, that the Committee was inspired in its cooperative attitude by the resolutions adopted by International Red Cross Conference of recent years encouraging the Red Cross to develop its efforts towards maintenance of peace.

I am sure that the willingness of the Committee, which has such a long and distinguished record of assistance to mankind in various humanitarian fields, was due to its recognition that the prevention of nuclear war must be a paramount concern of all of us.

Will you be so kind as to convey to the Committee the thanks of the United Nations for their fine attitude of cooperation in an hour of very grave need".

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